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SUBJECT: SPLM SIGNS MOU WITH UMMA PARTY AND PREPARES FOR TRILATERAL TALKS AND POLITICAL PARTY CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 87508

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On September 5, the Southern People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Umma parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) pledging Umma's support for free and fair elections and for a referendum that allows the South to choose unity with or separation from the North. Umma Party President Sadiq al-Mahdi's visit to Juba comes a week before the SPLM's planned conference at which all major political parties will discuss upcoming elections, referenda, and democratic transition in Sudan. Deputy SPLM Secretary General Anne Itto told Poloff that al-Mahdi's visit and the MOU constituted a pledge of Umma support for the SPLM. The SPLM Secretariat will meet on September 9 in Juba in advance of the U.S.-led trilateral meetings. End Summary.

SPLM and UMMA Party Sign MOU

¶2. (SBU) SPLM Deputy Secretary General Anne Itto told Poloff on September 4 that the visit of Sadiq al-Mahdi, head of the Umma Party, represents support for and an endorsement of the SPLM. Itto explained that al-Mahdi had expressed his party's commitment to free and fair elections, supported a referendum that allowed for voluntary unity or separation and a democratic transition that would lead to a truly "new" Sudan. In public statements, Itto said, al-Mahdi declared that it was still possible to maintain Sudan's unity, but "for unity to be attractive, it must be on the basis of justice and equality for all" in a new Sudan that accommodates all citizens. In private, however, he was clear that he was in favor of making self-determination "easier, simpler and more straightforward," according to Itto.

¶3. (SBU) Itto explained that the Umma Party recognized the importance of maintaining good relations with their "brothers in the South" regardless of the outcome of a referendum on self-determination. On September 5, after three days of talks, the two parties signed the MOU, which, Itto said, would be an important framework for the upcoming Political Parties Conference to be held in Juba during September 11-15.

SPLM To Host Political Parties Conference

¶4. (SBU) The upcoming conference has been in the works for three months, Itto said. She noted that the SPLM has been transparent in planning the conference, and has made clear that it is open to all registered political parties. The purpose of the conference is to bring together most major Sudanese political parties to discuss key issues facing Sudan, including elections, referendum preparedness and a democratic transition. Itto hopes that the parties will be

able to agree to a statement of principles at the conclusion of the conference.

¶ 15. (SBU) While the SPLM wants all parties to take part, the National Congress Party (NCP) set "too many" precondition on its participation, Itto said. The NCP leadership insisted on the inclusion of Lam Akol's SPLM-DC, which SPLM leadership refused to accept. Itto and others in the SPLM believe the NCP is requesting SPLM-DC attendance to create divisions in the SPLM. "Everyone knows the NCP is supporting Lam," and that SPLM-DC would be a proxy for Khartoum at the conference, she stated.

Machar-Taha Agree in Advance of Trilaterals Talks

¶ 16. (SBU) Vice President of the Government of Southern Sudan, Riek Machar, returned to Juba on September 3 following direct talks with Second Vice President of the Government of National Unity Ali Osman Taha, Itto told Poloff. While a press release was issued from Khartoum on September 2 laying out a number of agreed upon issues regarding the referendum, Itto and other members of the SPLM Secretariat were unaware of what had been agreed to in Khartoum. Machar had neither informally briefed members of the SPLM Secretariat nor briefed the GoSS Council of Ministers during the Friday September 4 Cabinet meeting. Itto stated that the SPLM Secretariat was meeting the evening of September 4, and that she would question Machar on what had occurred and been agreed to in Khartoum.

¶ 17. (SBU) Itto explained that of the three remaining issues, the issue of what constitutes a quorum of voters in the elections and

KHARTOUM 00001031 002 OF 002

how to draw constituency boundaries would be the most difficult to resolve. She did not see a lot of room for compromise, at this stage, in the SPLM's position. Regarding the referendum commission, Itto said she believes the national referendum committee seated in Khartoum should retain the final say over the referendum, as provided for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

¶ 18. (SBU) Comment: With the next round of trilateral talks set to commence in the coming days, Machar's failure to brief the Secretariat and Cabinet of Ministers in a timely manner is of concern. We understand Machar plans to return to Khartoum to meet with Ali Osman Taha sometime during the week of September 7 to continue discussions on the three remaining issues. Without consultation with others in the SPLM, it is unclear under whose guidance he is negotiating. End Comment.

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